

German newspaper publishes fraudulent refugee “sex-mob” report

Marianne Arens
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On February 6 in its Frankfurt local edition, the *Bild* newspaper ran an article with the headline “37 days after New Year, victims break their silence. Sex-mob raged in the Fressgass”—a popular city boulevard in the city. The news spread quickly but proved to be a pack of lies.

The article centred on the testimony of a sympathiser of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), pub owner Jan Mai. Citing Mai, *Bild* reporter Stefan Schlagenhauser wrote that a mob of “900 mostly drunken refugees” had rioted on New Year’s Eve, stealing from and sexually harassing those attempting to celebrate.

The article reported that dozens of foreign men had invaded Mai’s bar, First-In, where they assaulted women and stole a number of jackets.

The tabloid quoted Mai as follows: “When I entered, the whole place was full with a group of around 50 Arabs. They did not speak German, drank the drinks of guests, and danced in a provocative manner. The women asked me for help because they were being attacked. The mood changed completely.” Even two hours later there were “problems with the masses of refugees” in front of the bar.

Bild also presented a witness, the businesswoman Irina A., who said she had been sexually harassed in the bar by “around 50 Arabs,” “masses of refugees,” “900 mostly drunken refugees.” The vocabulary used by *Bild* is precisely that associated with the far-right AfD and Pegida movement. The *Bild* report was then taken up by many other news outlets, including the television channel Sat.1, the ultra-right *Jungen Freiheit* newspaper and in Great Britain by the UK edition of *Breitbart News*.

Sensationalist reports appeared in “serious” newspapers and dailies such as the *Frankfurter*

Rundschau, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and the *Offenbacher Post*.

The next day, the *Frankfurter Neue Presse* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* printed critical commentaries referring to “A sex mob that nobody has seen” (FAZ). But the false report was rapidly spread on Facebook and Twitter by right-wing groups.

The falsified report played into the hands of leading local politicians. Christoph Schmitt (CDU) protested about the “downside of refugee policy,” i.e., “masses of men ... making the city unsafe.” He called for “more police on the streets, and mobile video surveillance.”

Stephanie Wüst from the FDP (neo-liberal Free Democratic Party) group in the Frankfurt parliament agreed: “The state should punish the perpetrators with the full severity of the law and also not shy from deportations.” These standpoints were in turn taken up by *Bild*, which ran a new article demanding hysterically: “Zero tolerance! Video monitoring! More police!”

The Frankfurt police, however, were unable to find any evidence of the alleged incidents. It initiated an investigation but found nothing. When police questioned people living in the affected area they could find nothing to support Mai’s claims.

The police then turned to the public prosecutor, who undertook investigations into the witnesses cited by the *Bild* newspaper. A search of the apartment of Irina A., the chief witness for the report, uncovered air tickets and other evidence that showed she had spent New Year’s Eve in Belgrade. The woman, who had claimed that strange men had “grasped her everywhere” in First-In, was forced to admit she had not been in Frankfurt on New Year’s Eve.

After less than a week the web of lies collapsed, with the police acknowledging that after “intensive and

extensive investigations” the *Bild* report “lacked any foundation.” The entire story of refugees rampaging on New Year’s Eve in Frankfurt was a pack of lies.

On February 16, the *Bild-Zeitung* had to apologise publicly for the “untruthful reporting and the accusations made against the affected parties.” But the story had already travelled around the world.

On February 23, the *New York Times* wrote: “The story, about a mob of Arab men rampaging through the well-heeled streets of Frankfurt and sexually assaulting German women as they went, must have been irresistible—so irresistible that *Bild*, a popular newspaper, published it early this month with little scrutiny.”

The *Bild-Zeitung* acknowledged this criticism indirectly. Julian Reichelt, the head of the editorial board, told the Berlin *Tagesspiegel*: “The accusation [levelled at the paper] that we failed to report incidents concerning refugees became, apparently, the impetus for the report.”

Bild had relied on a “witness” who was easily identifiable as an AfD supporter. On his Facebook page (which he has now switched off), Mai posted hate comments against refugees and praised the AfD. After the AfD received more than 14 percent in a recent vote in Berlin, he wrote: “Keep it up, AfD.” He also spread a right-wing video with the title “Merkel must go.”

The owner of the MAI Gastro Group GmbH belongs to a layer of social climbers who seem to be encouraged by the rise of Donald Trump and the “alternative facts” spread by his spokeswoman Kellyanne Conway. Mai owns a number of bars, restaurants and luxury establishments in Frankfurt and the surrounding area, plus numerous other properties. Formerly, he served two years as a full-time soldier in a parachute regiment.

The unmasking of his story and the lies spread by *Bild* throws further light on the alleged mass sexual harassment of women in Cologne on New Year’s Eve 2015 and 2016. The alleged attacks in 2015 were the pretext for an unprecedented xenophobic campaign and build-up. There is no evidence to indicate such mass attacks took place.

The following year, thousands of policemen were mobilised in Cologne and horrific reports were then circulated about the activities of hundreds of so-called “Nafris” (a racist police term for “North African hardened criminals”). Police selected people based on

racial characteristics, held several hundred young men in a police cordon and did not permit them to enter the city centre.

Later, the police had to apologise and correct their statements. Initially the police referred to around 2,000 “North African-looking young men” who had come to Cologne. Later the police admitted that they had identified just 674 suspects, of whom only 30 stemmed from North Africa!

What took place in the city of Hamburg on New Years Eve 2015 was also falsified and exaggerated. On November 1, 2016 a judge from the Hamburg District Court freed the last of three accused persons and raised serious accusations against the investigation carried out by the police and prosecutor’s office.

The media image of “dangerous, criminal alien hordes bothering German women and girls” is part of the arsenal of the far right and serves as propaganda for the building of an authoritarian state.



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